

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAM-01 /058 W
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R 301505Z JAN 75
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7777
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
USMISSION OECD PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, UK
SUBJECT: LABOR GOVERNMENT SUFFERS FIRST PARLIAMENTARY
DEFEAT

REF: LONDON 16570

1. WILSON GOVERNMENT SUFFERED ITS FIRST PARLIAMENTARY
DEFEAT JANUARY 29 WHEN NINE LABOR MPS JOINED OPPOSITION
TO DEFEAT GOVERNMENT-BACKED AMENDMENT TO SOCIAL SECURITY
BILL BY 280 TO 265. SPECIFIC QUESTION CONCERNED LIMIT-
ATIONS ON EARNINGS OF OLD-AGE PENSIONERS. COMMONS
SOCIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE CHANGED ORIGINAL BILL, ALLOW-
ING PERMISSIBLE EARNINGS TO RISE FROM 18 POUNDS TO 50
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POUNDS PER WEEK OVER A THREE-YEAR PERIOD, WHILE GOVERN-

MENT OPPOSED THIS CHANGE ON FINANCIAL GROUNDS. GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT WAS DEFEATED WHEN 9 LABOR BACKBENCHERS IGNORED THREE LINE WHIP TO JOIN OPPOSITION. LABOR REBELS, HOWEVER, RETURNED TO FOLD ON NEXT VOTE, HELPING GOVERNMENT DEFEAT ANOTHER OPPOSITION-SPONSORED CHANGE IN SAME BILL.

2. FOLLOWING THE SESSION, GEORGE CUNNINGHAM, PARLIAMENTARY PRIVATE SECRETARY (PPS) TO EDUCATION SECRETARY REG PRENTICE AND LEADER OF BACKBENCH REBELLION ON THIS ISSUE, RESIGNED HIS PPS POSITION. ACCORDING TO PRESS, CUNNINGHAM RESIGNED BECAUSE IT WAS "AWKWARD" TO VOTE AGAINST GOVERNMENT AND CONTINUE AS PPS.

3. COMMENT: DEFEAT ON THIS MINOR, THOUGH EMOTIONAL ISSUE, DOES NOT REPRESENT SIGNIFICANT SETBACK FOR GOVERNMENT, NOR DOES IT DIRECTLY AFFECT WILSON'S CONTINUED ABILITY TO GOVERN. REBEL BACKBENCHERS COVERED LABOR PARTY IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM, SO THIS INCIDENT IS IRRELEVANT TO ON-GOING RIGHT/LEFT STRUGGLE WITHIN PARTY. NEVERTHELESS, THIS VOTE IS ANOTHER SIGN THAT LABOR WHIP REMAINS ONLY PARTIALLY EFFECTIVE (REFTEL) AND WILL INTENSIFY PRESSURES ON WILSON TO MAKE SOME EFFORT TO STRENGTHEN PARLIAMENTARY DISCIPLINE, A TASK HE APPARENTLY VIEWS WITH DISTASTE. THE MODERATE CUNNINGHAM'S RESIGNATION CONTRASTS STARKLY WITH ACTIONS OF 8 LEFT-WING PPS WHO OPPOSED GOVERNMENT ON DEFENCE REVIEW ISSUE (REFTEL).

SPIERS

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